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SUBJECT: PRISON TERMS FOR MPS WHO PAID CONDOLENCES TO
ZARQAWI FAMILY

REF: A) AMMAN 4245 B) AMMAN 4396 C) AMMAN 5219

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

11. (U) Jordan's State Security Court convicted and sentenced two members of the Chamber of Deputies August 6 to prison terms on charges of "fueling national discord and inciting sectarianism" under Article 150 of Jordan's penal code (ref A). The Court sentenced Mohammed Abu Fares to two years in prison, and Ali Abu Al-Sukkar to 18 months. The ruling did not address the case of Jafar Hourani, the third deputy on trial. All three are members of the Islamic Action Front, the political arm of Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood.

12. (SBU) The case opened with a July 25 arraignment at which the defense team walked out of the courtroom after its attempts to have bail set and to move the trial to the civilian court system were denied. The trial continued without the defense team, which Jordanian procedure permits when potential penalties are three years or less. The defendants argued that there was no law against visiting the condolence tent set up by Zargawi's family, and cited their participation in November 2005 in drafting the Front's condemnation of the hotel bombings. They are expected to appeal the decision to the Court of Cassation.

13. (C) Public reaction during the trial has been mixed, with pro-government journalists strongly condemning the actions of the MPs and reports of public resentment over their arrest (ref B).

14. (C) Comment: Until eclipsed by the Lebanon crisis, the arrest of the Front MPs, and other GOJ moves against the Muslim Brotherhood, dominated political discussion in Jordan. At least in the short-run, the government's strategy has paid off) the MB leadership was compelled to make a statement of support for Jordanian national unity and stability, and the divided organization, on the defensive, has been unable to exploit the Lebanon crisis to its advantage. The speed of this trial suggests the GOJ wished to resolve this controversy before convening the extraordinary session of parliament widely expected for late August (ref C). If the sentences are upheld on appeal, local speculation will turn to calculating the costs and benefits for the King of commuting the sentences in exchange for conciliatory gestures from the Islamic movement. End Comment.

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Hale